CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIRST PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 9 March 1995, at 10 a.m.

President: Mrs. Hisami Kurokchi (Japan)

GE.95-60862 (E)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 701st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have no speaker inscribed for today. Nevertheless, may I ask whether any delegation wishes to speak at this stage? This does not seem to be the case.

As you are aware, the representative of Pakistan, Ambassador Kamal, will be leaving us very soon. I think it is only appropriate for me to pay a special tribute to someone who, for the last six years, has represented the views and interests of his Government with authority, talent and elegance while, at the same time, bringing to this Conference a vast experience coupled with a keen insight into the intricacies of negotiation itself. As you know, over the years Ambassador Kamal has indeed contributed to making this Conference more flexible in conducting its own business by finding, through the exercise in improved and effective functioning, ways and means of overcoming the rigidities inherent in our rules of procedure. Ambassador Kamal has earned the respect of all members of this Conference and his departure will indeed be felt as a loss. However, I am sure that we will benefit from continued contact and the friendship of Ambassador Kamal in his new functions in New York. I know that I speak on behalf of all of us in wishing Ambassador Kamal and his family every happiness and success for the future. Ambassador Kamal, you have the floor.

Mr. KAMAL (Pakistan): Madam President, thank you very much for your kind words.

I am reminded of a true son of Italy a few hundred years ago, one of the most brilliant minds of his age and one of the most important scientists who ever existed, Galileo, who was condemned for believing that it was the Earth which went round the Sun and not the Sun which went round the Earth, and because of that belief he was condemned and sentenced, but just when the judgement was being pronounced he himself came out with a sentence which is historically famous, "e pur si muove" - and yet it moves. Over the six years that I have been here much has moved. I joined the Conference on Disarmament in 1989, and I sat in this very seat when I came to this august body. Over those intervening six years, because of our monthly rotation principle, I shuffled and shifted turn by turn to the next seat on my right, finally made it up on the podium, sat in the Chair that you occupy with so much elegance today, was then shunted down to the other side across the room and all the way around until I have come back where I started. That has been an extraordinary experience in itself, not only because it has enabled me to admire the extraordinary frescoes of this room from all sides and from all angles, but also because it has enabled me to see from totally different perspectives the problems that each one of us has to face in this body. That was a great experience in learning, in self-enrichment, in seeing what are the many things that should be done and the many things that should not be done.

(Mr. Kamal, Pakistan)

What are some of those lessons that I have learnt in those six years? Firstly, that there are always two sides at least to any question; that should have been obvious in any negotiating body, certainly one where vital national security interests have to be presented and defended, and certainly also because democracy is the art of compromise between my position and that of my neighbour. But unfortunately, much of the work that has been done in this Conference appears to have been based on the principle that what is mine is mine and what is yours is negotiable.

The second lesson that I have learnt is that we are in a process of deep and profound change; structures have crumbled, firstly because some people believe that they have won World War III, others who no longer know which bloc they are aligned with or party to, and still others who have no idea as to who to be non-aligned with or against. It is, therefore, normal that when standing on shifting sands of this type, our behaviour should become slightly irrational and irresponsible and frustrated. That irrationality and frustration is increasingly visible in this body.

Thirdly, an agenda or a course of action cannot be fixed or frozen in time - an agenda is a living organism, it has to evolve, it is framed at one point of time and in only one particular context. It cannot logically be valid at different periods of time and in different contexts. This is particularly so when we know - and each one of us here can bear witness to that - that the greatest part of the turmoil that we have seen in the past quarter-century has been regional in nature and with the use of conventional armaments. It is not possible to hold back due consideration of these two aspects, certainly not for much longer. The pressure is too great, and we must show a willingness to evolve and to move forward in step with the reality of our experience and time.

Fourthly, while consensus is important, it must have some "give" built into it. A ham-handed defence of national interests has to give way to the logic of what I would call a higher loyalty, namely that of loyalty to an international society in a global village. All of us are guilty here, the weaker to a lesser extent, the stronger to a greater extent. We must move forward in our consideration of how to face the inherent contradictions in the principle of consensus.

Fifthly, this Conference on Disarmament, with a membership of less than 40, cannot be representative of a society of more than 180. Expansion is, therefore, essential. That, unfortunately, cannot be according to the wishes of only some; it has to be the subject of a general and total agreement - a balance of ideas and a balance of colour has to be struck so that this Conference can do the task that is expected of it by international society. It does not matter if there are differences of opinion here; difference of opinion is the essence of democracy. We all learn from the opinions of others, and it is in adjusting to the opinions of others that we do not weaken ourselves individually but we strengthen ourselves collectively.

(Mr. Kamal, President)

Sixthly, we should not be overly afraid of windmills and shadows - many of them are topical, they come and they will pass. One of them looms large over this room today as we move slowly forward towards the deadline of next month. The more we start playing games with our current negotiations as a result, the more the impression grows that we have guilty consciences and skeletons to hide. Many of us may have made mistakes in the past, may not have fulfilled their sides of the bargain, but let us not compound those errors, let us learn from our collective mistakes and move forward, hopefully, into a slightly better world.

Seventhly and finally, the procedures in the CD need to be moved into a greater degree of informality. Perhaps we might try to advance the rule that speeches should be delivered wherever possible without written texts, as I am doing today. That might elevate the quality of the speeches; it might certainly enable us to speak our minds out more freely and understand each other's positions better and, most important of all, to gauge the degree of flexibility that exists in each other's positions. The process, incidentally, has already started: there are more informal plenaries than in the past. It needs to be nurtured even further.

For me personally, it has been six years of contact with the finest brains that one could ever come across. Some of them have sat on the same side of the table, others have been on the other side of the diplomatic divide. In the process of that debate, I myself have been bashed and stomped into the ground, but I have tried, I hope, to give back as good as I got. Much blood has been spilt on the floor of this body in the process, but irrespective of that, deep friendships have been struck, and I hope some respect earned. There may be some here who believe that the world of the CD may be better after I leave; they may be right, they may also be wrong. We do live in a smaller world. The destinies of Geneva and New York are, fortunately or unfortunately, very intimately linked. Much of our work here ultimately goes to New York and that is where I will be waiting and watching. The CD is an institution and membership of this institution is not an event, it is a process. We come and we go but the party and the negotiation goes on; it has been my privilege to have been part of that process and that party. I look forward to remaining in touch with you from the other side of the Atlantic; we shall all meet again, as you know, rather earlier than some might think or hope, but that will be my pleasure; I hope it will be yours too. I leave this body and Geneva in a few days. I take leave of all my friends on the floor, of all my friends on the benches of the observers, whose presence here has been an essential input into the work of the CD. I take leave of my friends in the secretariat, with whom I have sat and worked and perhaps cried at times. I take leave of the interpreters, who sit behind their anonymous glass booths and give us an input without which we would not be able to work at all. Thank you very much. Goodbye.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the distinguished representative of Pakistan, Ambassador Kamal, for his statement which certainly is filled with words of

(The President)

wisdom and which has given me a lot of food for thought for the future. I once again wish Ambassador Kamal well in his future work, and all of us certainly look forward to seeing him again in New York.

I feel it is my duty to inform you that consultations are still going on on all pending issues relating to the Presidential statement covering the agenda and organization of the 1995 session, and I hope to be in a position to report some progress in the near future.

The secretariat has, at my request, circulated a timetable of meetings for next week, which was as usual prepared in consultation with the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Nuclear Test Ban. It is, of course, tentative and subject to change if necessary. On this basis, may I take it that the timetable is acceptable?

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on 16 March 1995 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.